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# Synchronic ubiquity of the Basque article *-a*: A look from diachrony<sup>1</sup>

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The Basque definite article *-a* is used in more contexts than the articles in neighboring languages. This extensive use is problematic for synchronic analysis; this article will offer a diachronic perspective of the problem. Non-referential noun phrases (mass nouns and plural expressions in particular) in object position will be analyzed, showing that in old Basque they lacked the definite article; the extensive use of *-a/-ak* in these contexts in modern Basque will be related to the spread into non-referential expressions of the genitive plural declension mark *-en*, which shares its diachronic origin with the definite article *-a*.

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to sketch a diachronic context for some problems raised by synchronic analyses of the Basque article *-a*. In order to introduce this diachronic dimension, I will offer data from dialects and old texts; I believe they will help us understand some aspects of the striking extended use of the so-called definite article *-a*.

Paralleling the evolution of other languages (Spanish *el/la*, English *the*, etc.), the Basque *-a* is also assumed to have a demonstrative source; but the Basque *-a* has a much wider use range than its counterparts in the neighboring languages. The broad use of *-a* in Basque makes its analysis in synchronic terms difficult, since most analyses have traditionally been built on the basis of other “more typical” western articles; however, the data from dialects and older texts make variation apparent, a variation that witnesses the gradual spread of the article to its modern massive use.

I will exemplify this spread with a specific construction, which is often mentioned in the literature: I will focus on the noun phrases in the internal argument position of finite transitive verbs. I will also give some examples of what I believe to be

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further instances of the same spread phenomenon, drawing our attention to certain morphological elements that usually would not enter the discussion; the diachronic perspective on definite articles I will be taking will allow us to do that.

My approach will have a general character and it does not intend to have any explanatory value; synchronic analyses won't find here any convincing solution for their specific problems. Its main value consists on introducing some data from dialects and old texts as a complement to strictly synchronic analyses; it will also make clear that a diachronic perspective on articles allows us to identify other synchronic phenomena that should be integrated in the overall analysis of the extended use of articles.

As a more general goal, this paper would also like to be a call for more specific studies on this kind of data, since almost everything remains to be done in this domain, even the simplest descriptive tasks.

The article will be organized as follows: in the Section 2, I will offer some basic background about articles; Section 3 will be devoted to introducing some of the problems that are faced by synchronic analyses when treating the definite article. Dialectal examples as well as data from old texts will be offered in Section 4; additionally, a contact induced spread of the article will be claimed. In the Section 5 I will put together these diachronic data together with the synchronic problems sketched previously, and in Section 6 I will make some general remarks.

## **2. Basic background**

### **2.1 Some background about the diachrony of articles**

**2.1.1 *The definite articles in synchrony*** The analysis of the Basque article *-a* has usually been carried out within a certain tradition. This tradition has mostly been concerned with some well known western Euro-pean languages, and thus articles have been described as a characteristic feature of their grammar, often as opposed to article-less Latin.

Work on articles of this language area may have lead to a specific view on this functional category, also when dealing with Basque; I will summarize this view in two points:

Articles are usually viewed as single, well delimited morphological elements, like French *le*, English *the*, Spanish *el*, Welsh *yr* (leaving aside gender, case, number and phonetic variants), that are considered to be the counterparts of Basque *-a* (which is postposed and phrasal). Articles are the conveyors of definiteness *par excellence*, and much of the discussion in the literature has been developed in this vein: semantic and logical characterization of definiteness, identification of semantic factors that affect the use of articles in different syntactic contexts, comparison between languages of the microvariation in article use, etc. For a general introduction to the discussion, see Chesterman (1991: 1–40).

Most of the recent approaches to the issue of Basque articles have been made within this tradition, and this view has conditioned their analysis. Thus, the phrasal morpheme *-a* has been identified as being the Basque article, and many observations have been made about its extended use across different syntactic contexts. One of these observations will be the starting point for my discussion on Basque data (Section 3).

Simplifying, we could say that the synchronic analyses offer us a view according to which a definite article is a functional category spelled out as a certain morphological item, and its behavior is most typically specified on the basis of the notion of definiteness.<sup>2</sup>

I will try to make some caveats to this view in the next sections.

### 2.1.2 *The diachrony of articles*

The diachronic source of articles is well known for the languages mentioned in the previous section, although this diachronic dimension remains somewhat concealed when entering synchronic discussion; the importance of keeping an eye on their origin, as well as on their nature as elements immersed on certain diachronic processes, will become apparent when looking at the case of Basque case. A quote from Himmelmann will define the diachronic based view I will be following here:

Most importantly, from a grammaticisational point of view, definiteness, though undeniably of central importance to the grammar and typology of articles, is only one of a number of meanings that can be conveyed by articles. Thus, for example, specific articles indicate specificity rather than definiteness. Definiteness and specificity are only two salient (and crosslinguistically well attested) stages on the grammaticisation path in (1). Given a sufficiently fine-grained set of criteria, many more stages could be distinguished. Thus, on the one hand, the grammaticisation approach provides a more detailed typological grid for articles and includes a variety of phenomena not considered in the definiteness-based approach (further detail in § 3 and 4). On the other hand, the grammaticisation approach excludes some of the phenomena dealt with in the definiteness-based approach, in particular those grammatical structures which appear to be sensitive to definiteness but are not part of a grammaticisation path for articles (such as word order, case markers or verbal agreement). (Himmelmann 2001: 832)

Simplifying the wide range of phenomena behind this formulation, on the one hand we have articles as morphemes (certain phonic matter, with evolving values and functions in discourse through time), derived from demonstratives, and on the other hand we have the notion of definiteness. Most works dealing with the synchronic behavior of articles try to account

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the adjective “definite” betrays its definition, and thus it becomes clear that the article is usually named on the base of its function as a definiteness marker.

for them on the basis of their function as definiteness markers; from a diachronic (i.e. grammaticalization) perspective, definiteness is only one more face of articles, not the central one: the important point is the grammaticalization path of a certain morpheme that linguists will eventually classify as a definite article. Following Himmelmann, we can sketch this path with a rudimentary schema (2001: 832):

(1) demonstrative → definite article → specific article → noun marker

Thus, articles, as evolved from demonstratives, may convey different values, ranging from definiteness marking to noun marking. The term “D-element” will be used as a cover term for the chronologically different instances of the same evolving morpheme.

Of course, not every morpheme deriving diachronically from a demonstrative fits the D-element grammaticalization path in (1); demonstratives may evolve into many “things” (Diessel 1999). Here, since we are talking about articles, we will focus on elements that appear modifying the noun phrase, forming what scholars would usually consider a determiner phrase; I will argue that they are further instances of D-elements (Section 2.2).

## 2.2 Basic background about the evolution of Basque D-elements

From a diachronic perspective, Basque article *-a* is not an “orphan” element. It has a certain origin, shared with other elements: we may identify more D-elements, although we might need to broaden the definition of D-elements.

In previous works (Manterola 2006, 2009) I detailed what seems to be the most plausible explanation for the diachronic origin of part of the Basque declension: more concretely, I treated the locative singular case, the plural local cases, and the plural ergative and genitive cases, claiming that they are all instances of grammaticalized demonstratives. Actually, this idea was already proposed for most singular cases (Lafon 1970, Michelena 1961: 213), and all I did was extending that idea to some other cases; even what I said about some plural cases was already explicitly or implicitly said elsewhere (Duvoisin 1866: 10, Lafitte 1935: 261, Irigoyen 1981: 368), though usually unnoticed in current research (see Azkarate & Altuna 2003: 46 and 116–118 on this confusing situation). I will briefly sketch this evolution, using the word *etxe* ‘house’ for local cases, and *ume* ‘kid’ for the rest (the one in Table 1 is a somehow idealized demonstrative system; a more detailed discussion on this issue can be found in Manterola 2009 and in press (a)):

I keep the absolute plural *-ak* out of this table on purpose. Some analyses have included it as one more instance of a grammaticalized demonstrative (*etxe-ak* < *etxe \*haga*) (Hualde 2008: 210), but even though this would be the most straightforward hypothesis for its evolution, I still think there are some obscure points to be elucidated. Although I believe this

caveat is worth keeping in mind, in this paper I will refer to *-ak* as a D-element (in synchronic analyses it is considered to be the plural definite article), in order to make clearer the point in Sections 3.2 and 4.

**Table 1.** Diachronic evolution of D-elements: From demonstratives to articles

<b>Singular</b>		
<b>Absolutive</b>	umea ‘the kid’	< ume ha ‘that kid’
<b>Genitive</b>	umearen ‘of the kid’	< ume haren ‘of that kid’
<b>Dative</b>	umeari ‘to the kid’	< ume hari ‘to that kid’
<b>Locative</b>	etxean ‘in the house’	< etxe han2 ‘in that house’
<b>Plural</b>		
<b>Ergative</b>	umeek ‘the kids’	< ume hek ‘those kids’
<b>Genitive</b>	umeen ‘of the kids’	< ume hen ‘of those kids’
<b>Local cases</b>	etxeetan ‘in the houses’	< etxe hetan ‘in those houses’
	etxeetara ‘to the houses’	< etxe hetara ‘to those houses’
	...	
ardoa		∅

Coming back to Table 1, and looking at what comes after *ume* and *etxe* (*-a*, *-aren*, *-ari*, *-an*, *-ek*, *-en*, *-etan*, *-etara*), it becomes clear that we are dealing, in most cases, with grammaticalized demonstratives (in fact, other phenomena like analogical extensions not following strict grammaticalization paths may have taken place); thus, making the definition illustrated by the path in (1) a little bit broader (cases other than absolutive won't most surely become case markers) we could consider them all to be D-elements, since they are grammaticalized demonstratives at the rightmost place of noun phrases.

All morphemes as presented in the first column of Table 1 share the same demonstrative origin, but it is nevertheless understandable why morphemes like *-en*, *-ek*, *-etan*, on the one side, are not usually regarded as related to *-a*, on the other, the article *par excellence*.

As suggested in Section 2.1.1, conditioned by a strictly synchronic perspective on articles, we tend to identify the functional category of article with a single item; to that extent morphemes in the second group (plural ergative, genitive and local cases) are not easily identified with it. They do not “look like” articles, almost nothing in their shape reminds us of the archetypical article *-a*. On the other side, looking at its functions and use, this *-a* is best compared to the articles in the absolutive case of other languages, in “core” functions such as subject of intransitive verbs, object of transitive verbs, existential sentences, predicates...

As a corollary of the ideas exposed in this section, I would like to underline two points:

As for the case of Basque: we do not have a single article; I think we are allowed to identify more D-elements, inasmuch as the term D-element would cover any instance of a demonstrative grammaticalized within the noun phrase.

2. In *umearen*, *umeari* and *etxean* the suffixes *-ren*, *-ri* and *-n* stand for genitive,

dative and locative cases, respectively, and *-a* for the definite article. Thus, from a synchronic point of view they are usually analyzed in an agglutinative manner: *ume-a-ren*, *ume-a-ri* and *etxe-a-n*. Regarding the traditional path for the grammaticalization of articles: data from Basque may expand the phenomena to be accounted for by the grammaticalization path in (1). If this evolutionary outline focuses on demonstratives grammaticalizing within noun phrases, we could maybe accept that not all demonstratives follow strictly the path in (1) and we could understand it as describing the evolution of a subset of demonstratives, namely the ones that bear absolutive case. This would be convenient for Basque's case, where we have a postpositional clitic declension.

The first point will be crucial for part of the discussion in Sections 4.3 and 5.2: we will see that some extended uses of *-ak* may be related to phenomena that can be described for other D-elements. The second point enters a discussion about the possible grammaticalization paths of demonstratives which I won't be dealing with in this article.

### 3. Synchronic problems with *-a*

In the previous section I have sketched the evolution of Basque declension, recalling the existence of D-elements directly related in their origin to the so called definite article *-a* (and, by extension, to plural *-ak*): they all have a demonstrative origin.

This section will show how certain unexpected (as compared to other languages) uses of *-a* and *-ak* have been dealt with in synchronic studies.

#### 3.1 Ubiquitous *-a*

The Basque article *-a* is usually described as having a broader range of use than its counterparts in other languages:

[t]he label 'definite article' is misleading, since this article is of much broader use than the English definite article [...] *ura* may correspond either to 'water' or to 'the water', and *umeak* may correspond either to 'children' or to 'the children'. (Trask 2003: 119–121)

The Basque article *-a* may appear in many unexpected contexts as compared to English or Romance languages; here I offer examples of some of those syntactic contexts, where this difference can be observed:

##### (2) Internal argument position

a. Mass nouns Jon-ek **ardo-a** edan du. John-erg wine-art drunk has 'John has drunk wine/the wine'

b. Plural noun (object) Jon-ek **gaztain-ak** jan ditu. John-erg chestnut-art.pl eaten has 'John has eaten chestnuts/the chestnuts'

c. Plural noun (subject) **Tren-ak** etorri dira Train-art.pl come have 'Trains<sup>3</sup>/The trains have arrived'



(3) Existential sentences

a. Collective nouns **Jende-a** badago kalean people-art there.is in.the.street  
'There are people on the street'

b. Mass nouns: **Ardo-a** badago hozkailuan wine-art there.is in.the.fridge  
'There is wine in the fridge'

c. Count nouns in plural: **Harri-ak** daude bidean stone-art.pl there.are  
on.the.road 'There are stones on the road'

(4) Noun predicates expressing a job (plural predicates have *-ak* instead of *-a*)  
Jon **irakasle-a** da John teacher-art is 'John is a teacher'

(5) Adjective predicates (plural predicates have *-ak* instead of *-a*)

a. Adjective: Jon **handi-a** da John big-art is 'John is big'

b. Adjective with a noun: Jon **mutil handi-a** da John guy big-art is 'John is a  
big guy'

3. As an anonymous reviewer points out to me, the indefinite interpretation of this example is doubtful, at least for some speakers, who require a specific context (something like contrastive focus) in order to get this reading: *trenak etorri dira, ez kotxeak* 'trains have arrived, not cars'. I will keep on citing this example, since Artiagoitia (2002) bases his synchronic argumentation on it. In this example, unlike the examples in (2a, b), we have an internal argument of an unaccusative verb.

There is a noteworthy difference between both types of adjective predicates: as we can see, English translates them in different ways, with a bare adjective the first, and with a phrase introduced by an indefinite article the second. A similar difference has been noticed (Michelena 1978) in classic Basque texts, which can be summarized with the title of Michelena's article: *on da* 'it is good' vs. *gauza ona da* 'it is a good thing'; a modified noun or adjective phrase like *gauza ona* (as opposed to the simpler *on*) can be considered as having a more specific reference, and this fact may have triggered the earlier spread of the article to this kind of constructions.

(6) Exclamatives

a. With adjective: Ze **handi-a!** what big-art 'How big it is!'

b. With noun: Ze **etxe-a!** what house-art 'What a house!'

Looking at these examples, it becomes clear what the "problem" with the Basque article *-a* is: it appears everywhere, in almost any kind of syntactic context where we would not expect it to appear; *-a* may be an article, but it does not seem to be a typical *definite* article, since definiteness (whatever it might be) does not offer a convincing grasp of its exact nature.

Basque studies still lack an exact description of the article's behavior; relevant syntactic contexts have to be chosen in order to accomplish this task and, leaving aside standard Basque which has no explicit rule for article use, traditional ways of speaking have to be systematized on this basis. As an example of which kind of micro-variation I am talking about, let's take the sentences above: their article-less counterparts may be perfectly grammatical, depending on the dialect we look at; and of course, the use of the article differs, gradually or abruptly, from one variety to another.

This gradual variation can be observed diatopically, but we lack its exact description; moreover, the underlying patterns of this micro-variation are not well defined yet. This diatopic variation is closely related to diachronic variation, since synchronic dialectal variation often reflects variation across time. In the next chapters I will try to illustrate how semantic or syntactic patterns used to explain synchronic facts are interlaced with the underlying patterns observed for diachronic as well as for diatopic variation.

### 3.2 Synchronic analysis of non-conventional uses of the Basque article

In Section 3.1 I have offered some examples (2–6) showing that the Basque definite article *-a* does not match the use of its Spanish or English counterparts; non-conventional use of *-a* means therefore non-conventional as compared to other languages. Synchronic studies have paid some attention to this *a priori* non expected broad use of definite article *-a*. I will take Artiagoitia's (2002) work as a guide;<sup>4</sup> his analysis has focused on noun phrases referring to mass and plural expressions (remember 2a–c above) in internal argument position. The subsequent discussion on dialectal and diachronic data in Section 4 will also be confined to this kind of noun phrases, in order to have straightforward parallels in both diachronic and synchronic dimensions.

These are Artiagoitia's examples (number 8 in his article):

(7) a. *Trenak* heldu dira.

'(The) trains arrived' a'. \*\**Tren* heldu dira.<sup>5</sup>

b. *Ardoa* edan dut.

'I drank (the) wine' b'. \*\**Ardo* edan dut.

*Trenak* and *ardoa*, both with *-a*, may have the two interpretations suggested by the English glosses: they may be translated as bare nouns (*trains*, *wine* respectively) or as definite expressions (*the trains*, *the wine* respectively). As we can see, their bare counterparts (7a' and 7b') are ungrammatical. According to Artiagoitia's analysis (2002: 78) "DP [determiner phrase] arguments must have number specified in an extended projection of the noun" and that's the reason of the ungrammaticality of article lacking examples. He also recalls, giving a further example (here in 8), the constraints on interpretation of ergative plural DPs<sup>6</sup>; interestingly, the existential interpretation is not possible:

(8) *Trenak* aurreratu gaituzte. '\*\*(the) trains have passed us'

The description of the behavior of the DP *trenak* is given as follows: "Crucially, as noted by Laka (1993: 161) and Artiagoitia (1997: 162), Basque disallows the existential interpretational of DPs headed by the article

precisely in external argument position”.

At this point, Artiagoitia recalls the existence of similar interpretation restrictions in languages such as English or Italian: external arguments cannot have, as noted in the quote above, an existential interpretation. Sentences like *\*\*trenes nos han adelantado*

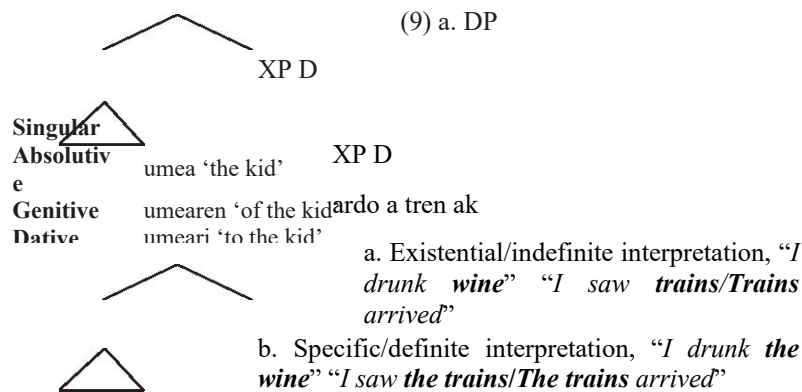
1. For an alternative account of Basque facts, see Etxeberria (2010).

2. Double asterisk indicates non-grammaticality; a single asterisk indicates a reconstructed form.

3. In this article I do not have any especial commitment to the theoretical status of determiner phrases as opposed to noun phrases; I will usually refer to them as noun phrases, and switch to the determiner phrase term when necessary for a better understanding of the discussion.

4. (Spanish), *\*\*trains have passed us* are ungrammatical, just the same as the existential interpretation of (8) is in Basque.

Thus, it seems that similar syntactic restrictions hold for all three languages, the difference being that Basque *-a* joins together two different functions (the article and the null article [Ø] of the other languages) in internal arguments. In order to explain this behavior, Artiagoitia offers two different structures:



It becomes clear that the problem arises when we try to define the exact nature of that XP (unknown category phrase) in the structure offered for the existential interpretation, an XP that is isomorphic with the DP. Artiagoitia lists two possibilities: he discards one of them, but they are both interesting if we look at them from a diachronic point of view:

That XP could be, as a whole, a noun phrase, with blended articles. The problem, of course, is that these blended articles are not such; indeed *ardo* and *tren* may appear as full noun phrases. Thus, *ardo* and *trenak* (and consequently, that XP) have to be something else. As quoted above, according to Artiagoitia DP arguments must have number specified, and thus Artiagoitia thinks that the XP may be a functional head somehow related with nouns: in his opinion, this functional head has to be number. This is the solution Artiagoitia prefers.

Both possibilities regarded by Artiagoitia deserve a comment from the point of view of the diachronic evolution of the Basque noun phrase. I will come back to this point in Section 5.1.

#### **4. The contribution of diachronic and dialectal data to the understanding of these phenomena**

In the previous section I have offered a brief sketch of how synchronic analyses explain certain phenomena related to the behavior of *-a* (and plural *-ak*). The problems identified in this synchronic perspective have, of course, a diachronic as well as a diatopic dimension.

This section will be divided into three subsections: in the first one, I will offer examples of mass and plural expressions in argument position, data especially concerning the use or non use of the article in ancient Basque and modern Eastern dialects; crucially, these kinds of noun phrases are the last to take an article. In the second subsection, I will briefly mention some cross-linguistic parallels of the use of bare nouns. And in the third subsection I will recall a typical explanation given in Basque studies for the spread of the article.

##### **4.1 Bare objects in diatopic and diachronic perspective**

Taking up again the synchronic discussion above, the question a diachronist would ask would not be why (7a') and (7b') are ungrammatical (in fact, similar examples happen to be correct in some dialects), saying that there is a certain functional projection that must be filled, or why an existential interpretation is impossible in (8); rather, we would aim at explaining how instances of noun phrases with D-elements (*-a*, *-ak*, *-ek*) got to have an existential reading; which happens to be roughly the same, although the departure point changes a little. I am thus assuming the definite reading to be primary, and the existential one chronologically secondary; this is obvious, but worth remembering, since demonstratives – the source of articles-, are definite by themselves.

The examples in this section will be of the type of (2a, b) or (7b, b'): I will confine the subsequent discussion to the noun phrases in the internal argument position of transitive verbs, leaving aside the internal argument of intransitive verbs (2c or 7a; see footnote 3); these noun phrases can be translated into English as plural expressions or mass expressions. For a more detailed discussion, see Manterola (in press(b)).

##### **4.1.1 Bare noun phrases in object position in Eastern varieties**

It has been said that “[...] one interesting property of Basque DPs is that the presence of an overt D seems obligatory” (Artiagoitia 2002: 77); that is

maybe true for the morphosyntax of standard Basque, but when we look at the language as a whole, ancient texts and dialects included, that statement needs some caveats. The following examples will introduce the discussion: *bertsu kantatzen*, *pinu pikatzen*, *arto xuritzen*... ‘singing **verses**, cutting **pin**s down, **peeling** corn’

They are all instances of the construction *bare noun + verbal noun in locative*. This kind of construction is most typical in modern Eastern dialects, although it may be found in fossilized constructions in Western varieties. These verbal nouns in locative express events of unbound aspect that can be characterized as iterative events, a kind of event that seems to be bound to noun expressions of low-referential load; the general observation made by Hopper and Thompson (1980: 279) claiming that “[there are] no languages in which imperfectivity correlates with definiteness [of the direct object]” could apply to the facts presented here. If these ideas are correctly interwoven, it is no accident that remnants of the old bare noun system appear in this kind of construction.

I will now turn to old texts. Even though the examples in (10) are interesting, it could be argued that these bare noun constructions do not follow a general pattern of the language, since they appear within a non-finite verb construction; but this is not the case of the examples found in Oihenart’s proverbs (Oihenart 1657), French translation by the author himself:

- (11) a. 279. **Inzaur** duenak jateko, aurkit diro **harri** hausteko. Celui qui a **des noix** à manger, trouvera assez de **pierres** pour les casser  
 b. 216. **Haur** duenak, anhitz behar; eztuenak, gogoanbehar. Celui qui a **des enfants**...

In (11a, b) we have *object + inflected verb* pairs (*inzaur duenak*, *aurkit diro harri* and *haur duenak*) where three count bare nouns (*inzaur* ‘walnut’, *harri* ‘stone’ and *haur* ‘kid’) in object position may be interpreted and are translated as partitive expressions with plural morphology (*des noix*, *des enfants*, *de pierres*). They are all bare noun expressions with non-specific reference.

This kind of construction is easily found in texts; here we have an example cited by Michelena (1987: 293):

- (12) Leizarraga (1571: Rom. 11, 8.) Eman ukan.draue Iaincoac spiritu ithobat: eta **begui**, ikus ezteçatençat: Gave them God spirit stupor.a: and **eye**, see not.to: eta **beharri**... and **ear** ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, **eyes** that would not see and **ears** ...’

In Leizarraga’s example, when reference to the count nouns *begui* ‘eye’ and *beharri* ‘ear’ is made, the relevant point in discourse is not to make clear their number status; rather reference is made to a noun as referring to the general notion or kind it expresses. Thus, in languages with overt plural marking (and in most varieties of modern Basque), they are inevitably translated as plurals.



Anthroponym *Pero Periz Garidario* (dating 1366, mentioned by Irigoien 1985: 135), where *Garidario* is a Navarrese (thus probably Eastern) nickname meaning ‘the one to whom wheat flows’, is a protohistoric example of what we can find in historical times in Basque: we have a mass noun *gari* ‘wheat’, in its determinerless form, as the internal argument of the verb.

Examples similar to the ones in (10–12) can be found in some modern Eastern dialects:

(13) Zuberoan and Roncalese Basque

- a. Etxebarne (2010: 64) Atzo **sagar** erosi düt Yesterday **apple** bought have ‘Yesterday I bought some apples’
- b. Zapirain (2005: 40’) hoi bizitzen balin bada, Xibeuk badü **baikortasun** eta **itxaropen** that live if it.is, Soule has **optimism** and **hope** ‘if that works, Soule still has **optimism** and **hope**’
- c. Bernat (1975–78) banek egoztan zia **gaztaña**, beste banek **iltzaur**, beste bat **sagar**, one threw **chestnut**, another **walnut**, another **apple**, eta **deiru** ere bai. and **money** too ‘(Usually) someone threw **chestnuts**, someone else **walnuts**, another one **apples**, and **money** too’
- d. Bernat (1975–78) eta guziek hiltan balin bagunien **txerri**... and we.all killed if aux **pig** ‘and if we all killed **a pig**’
- e. Bernat (1975–78) pues emoitzen gunia, banek **lukainka**, bestek **lomo**, bestek **ogi**, ... so we.gave, one **sausage**, another **loin**, another **bread** ‘we used to give, someone **some sausage**, someone else **loin**, someone else **bread**’
- f. Mendigatxa (Irigoyen 1957: 129–135) nik, kementik oiltzen daudala **paper** eta **estalki** I, from.here send you **paper** and **envelope** ‘I will send you from here **paper** and **envelopes**’
- g. Mendigatxa (Irigoyen 1957: 129–135) **mezu** oil bezta **message** send me ‘send me **a message**’

In these examples from Eastern dialects, we have prototypical mass nouns, such as *deiru, ogi, paper...* ‘money, bread, paper’ (13c, e, f). We also have abstract nouns in (13b): *baikortasun* and *itxaropen* ‘optimism’ and ‘hope’. And we also find count nouns: *iltzaur, sagar, estalki* ‘walnut’, ‘apple’, ‘envelope’ (13a, c, f), all appearing as bare nouns; as I said above, they may be translated as plurals in other languages or contemporary central Basque.

As for the count nouns *txerri* and *mezu* ‘pig’, ‘message’ (13d, g) they cannot be translated as plurals. However, they may be nouns given without any kind of specific reference to real objects; in the example *mezu oil beztad* ‘send me message’, the imperative mood may also be a relevant factor.

As a general pattern, it seems that non-specific plural nouns (identified as plural when translating them into overt plural marking languages) and mass nouns go together. This is the important point.

As we can see, in old northern texts, as well as in the last Roncalese testimonies, we can find bare nouns in almost any kind of syntactic context.

#### 4.1.2 Western bare noun phrases in object position and other examples

Besides the Eastern data discussed in the previous subsection, we can also find similar examples in western texts; this situation would suggest that in earlier stages Basque dialects were more uniform with respect to noun determination. See the examples in (14), from a South-Western variety:

(14) Pérez de Lazarraga (1564)

- a. Coplaric<sup>7</sup> ondo ordenaet[an/**abilidade** badoçu (B14: 38) Verses well ordering/**ability** if.you.have ‘If you have the ability of making verses’
- b. eurc jaquin ez arren, badogu **diru** (B3: 17) you know not even.though, we.have **money** ‘even though you do not know it, we do have **money**’

I could not find examples in Lazarraga’s text where bare count noun phrases in object position would be translated as plural expressions; instead, in the examples above we have instances of abstract (*abilidade* in 14a) and mass (*diru* in 14b) nouns. Again, in both examples the noun phrases in bold would be uttered with some kind of noun

7. The use of the partitive marker *-(r)ik* in object function should also be considered together with the bare and determined forms of the noun; in this article I only focus on the alternation between the bare form of the noun and the noun phrases bearing an article.

determination (article *-a* or partitive *-rik*) in modern Western Basque (*abilidade-rik/a badozu* and *badogu diru-a/-rik*).

Now look at the examples in (15):

- (15) a. *egoszi vr ardaoan, bildurr* egosçi (lexical entries of an old Western dictionary)  
b. **Guivel** eguioc ecachari ‘hazle espaldas a la tempestad’(part of a Biscayan proverb)

In Landuchio’s 1562 dictionary, a further exponent of old South-Western Basque, example (15a) *egoszi ur ardaoan* ‘pour water into the wine’ (Knörr and Zuazo 1998: 209) follows exactly the same pattern: a determinerless mass noun, *ur* ‘water’, is the internal argument of the transitive verb *egoszi* ‘pour’. In the other case (1998: 221) we have *bildur* ‘fear’, not a mass noun, but an abstract one. In (15b), from the 1596 text *Refranes y Sentencias* (Lakarra 1996: 358), we have a count noun, *gibel* ‘back’ which is translated with a plural noun in Spanish, *espaldas* ‘backs’. Of course, this example may be understood as an idiomatic expression, but it is also true that idiomatic expressions often keep traces of ancient morphological and syntactic rules.

In the same vein as these alleged idiomatic expressions, there is a group of unergative verbs in Basque, which may be analysed as having internal arguments incorporated with a light verb such as *egin* ‘to do’ (see Oyharçabal 2006 for discussion and references); crucially, those incorporated internal arguments, of non-specific reference or low referentiality, are all bare nouns. *Lo egin, lan egin, amets egin, negar egin, hitz/berba egin...* would be examples of this kind of unergative verbs. In verbs like *hitz egin* and *berba egin* (western) ‘talk’, we have a bare count noun together with a light verb, for which a word by word translation would perfectly accept a plural noun: *to make words*. Furthermore, we have an interesting western construction for *talk*, where the clear loan word *berba* stands in “object” position: there we have something seemingly based on a plural Latin form, *berba* from *verba* (neuter plural), rather than a word continuing Latin *verbum*, something like *\*\*berbo*, which does not exist in Basque. Although we lack decisive data, this hypothesis would most surely imply that this loanword would have entered the language through a similar construction, since in Western Basque *berba* also means ‘word’, in the singular.

If this were so, the identification of certain bare nouns with Latin plurals would have an early example here, even earlier than the modern Romance plural marking.

The examples in Sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 make clear that Basque, even if not in its standard form, does have bare nouns in argument position. In fact, historical data from different dialects (Eastern together with Western) support the idea that the use of the article was much more restricted in old Basque; to this extent, Eastern dialects are more conservative than the innovative Western dialects. I am not the first, of course, to note this; other scholars such as Lafon (1954, 1970) or Michelena have noticed this:

Ahora bien, a lo largo de toda la corta historia de la lengua vasca, e incluso en lo que se puede reconstruir o adivinar de su prehistoria, se observa un rasgo constante, cada vez mas manifiesto: la progresiva sustitución de la declinación indeterminada, que casi no subsiste mas que residualmente, por la determinada.

(Michelena 1987: 293)

All along the history of the Basque language, or even in what we can reconstruct or guess about its prehistory, we can observe a constant feature, increasingly more manifest: the gradual substitution of the determinerless declension, which only subsists residually, by the determined one. [Translation mine, JM]

In the next section I will briefly recall the existence of similar bare object constructions in other languages.

#### 4.2 Mass nouns and bare plurals in other languages

In Section 3.2 I have sketched what the problems are in synchronic analyses with internal arguments that bear mass nouns and plural count nouns. In Section 4.1 I have offered further Basque data, where bare nouns in internal argument position showed a rather interesting semantic characterization: they could almost all be interpreted as mass or plural expressions.

This pattern (mass and plural expressions behaving similarly) can be observed in other languages, such as Finnish: “[...] the most obvious resemblance resides in the fact that mass nouns characteristically appear without articles, just as the bare plurals do” (Välímää-Blum 2000/2001: 193).

Longobardi (1994), dealing with Italian, also points out the relevance of treating together mass and plural expressions both expressed by means of bare nouns in this language. He has doubt about the convenience of treating those noun phrases as real arguments, instead of treating them as “simple” idiomatic constructions. I admit that some of the examples I provided, especially the light verb construction, may be better analyzed as being idiomatic expressions nowadays, but I do not believe that all the examples above should be treated that way.

Summarizing, mass and plural expressions have been described to follow similar morphosyntactic patterns in Italian, English and Finnish. But these languages have an overt marking for plurality, while ancient and dialectal Basque data illustrating noun phrases in the same contexts do not have any; bare plurals in those languages would be translated by completely bare nouns in certain varieties of Basque (ancient or dialectal).

We may look for other better parallels of those varieties of Basque that are able to use bare nouns in internal argument position. Turkish and Korean may be good examples of this language type. As for Korean, let's follow Greenberg:

[...] the form labelled singular in Korean grammars, which incidentally has zero expression, may be either specifically singular, or on occasion be used when

more than one object is involved [...] Thus it may be presumed that the Korean listener interprets the zero form usually or *par excellence* as singular but as plural where the situation demands it. (Greenberg 1966: 28)

Thus, it seems that in Korean bare nouns may be interpreted as singular or plural depending on the context. We will see this better with the next quote about Turkish:

In general, *bir* [*bir* is the numeral ‘one’ in Turkish] is only used when the indefinite noun phrase refers to a particular entity, that is, when it is a specific indefinite (as in *I’ve just bought a superb car*). Where there is no specific referent (for example in *I’m looking for a reliable car*, where I do not have a particular car in mind), or where the identity of the thing referred to is of no importance for the discourse, Turkish has the option of using the bare noun, without determiner, and without number marking. The noun is therefore vague as to number in this “incorporation” construction. Consider (78), where the non-specific bare noun is a direct object:

- (78) *Dün mektup yaz-dı-m yesterday letter write-past-1sg ‘Yesterday I wrote a letter/letters’* (Lyons 1999: 96)

I will highlight two points in this quote: first, as seen for Finnish, the referential status of this kind of phrases is non-specific, non-defined or of low importance in discourse. Second, the mention of the incorporation phenomenon is interesting when dealing with these kinds of examples: that is one of the analyses offered for the *noun + light verb* construction mentioned above.

In my opinion, the behavior of Korean and Turkish matches the behavior of ancient Basque, which is still productive in some Eastern dialects and remains in certain constructions in general Basque (quantifier constructions such as *lagun asko* ‘many friends’ or *bi lagun* ‘two friends’); the existence of these bare nouns would thus be considered as an archaic feature.

#### 4.3 Contact induced spread of *-a* and *-ak*: The role of overt plurality marking

In Section 4.1 I offered some ancient and dialectal data, claiming then that they reflect the grammatical situation of old Basque; I have also recalled similar constructions in other languages (Section 4.2). I have focused on internal arguments of finite verbs that bear mass and plural nouns, and the data offered so far can be summarized as follows:

In synchronic analyses, Basque internal arguments with non-specific interpretation raise some problems, since they bear articles where other languages would not accept them at all. I have recalled the fact that this kind of noun phrase appears as a bare noun in several sources. Thus, I have claimed that the articles (*-a* and *-ak*) were introduced there later than in other contexts, assuming a time when articles did not exist. Other constructions like existential sentences also show similar behavior in similar dialectal territories.

It becomes clear that Basque has undergone a change in its grammar: the article was introduced in constructions that previously would not have accepted it. How did this happen? How did some D-elements, inherently definite, end up having an existential reading?

According to a hypothesis raised, among others, by Irigoien (1985: 129), the spreading of *-a* and *-ak* may have been caused by the need for overt plural marking, a distinction formerly not encoded in the morphology of Basque, at least not in the fashion of the surrounding languages. Since the articles are the only elements that overtly encode the distinction, it seems that both articles have spread under the model of Romance singular and plural morphology (cf. Spanish *chico/chicos* ‘boy/ boys’). Thus, the need for an overt singular-plural overt distinction has somehow concealed the original definiteness load of *-a* and *-ak*, making it secondary and overtaken by plurality marking. It could be said that the overt singular-plural distinction in nouns and adjectives has grown at the expenses of the definite singular and plural articles.

I will illustrate this hypothetical contact effect with some examples and different constructions; this will show that, contrary to what the examples presented so far have illustrated, this phenomenon is not limited to internal arguments. Of course, the only purpose of these examples is to sketch what happened; a real in deep analysis of dialectal variation and texts is still lacking, and other determiners of the noun phrase such as the partitive *-(r)ik* should also be brought into the discussion. Thus these examples are merely illustrative of an imperfect hypothesis. Eastern like, archaic examples will be offered in (a); (b) examples will be for central Basque and (c) examples will offer their alleged Romance counterparts, possible models of plurality marking:

(16) Adjective predicate construction

- a. Itsaso-a-n ur-ak **handi** dira sea-the-in water-the **big** are
- b. Itsaso-a-n ur-ak **handi-ak** dira sea-the-in water-the **big-art.pl** are
- c. Las agua-s en el mar son **grande-s** the water-s in the sea are **big-pl** ‘Waters are **big** in the sea’

(17) Existential construction

- a. Bada **kazetari** there.is **journalist**
- b. Badira **kazetari-ak** there.are **journalist-art.pl**
- c. Hay **periodista-s** there.are **journalist-pl** ‘There are **journalists**’

(18) Count nouns in object position

- a. Eman ukan.draue Iaincoac spiritu ithobat: eta **begui**, ikus Gave them God spirit stupor.a and **eye**, see ezteçatençat: eta **beharri**, encun ezteçatençat ... not.to: and **ear** hear not.to
- b. Eman die Jainkoak espiritu ito bat: eta **begi-ak**, Gave them God spirit stupor a and **eye-art.pl**, ez dezaten ikus: eta **belarri-ak**, ez dezaten entzun. not.to see and **ear-art.pl** not.to hear
- c. Dios les dió espíritu de estupor, **ojo-s** con que no vean y God them gave spirit of stupor, **eye-pl** with which no see and **oído-s** con que no oigan. **ear-s** with which no hear ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, **eyes** that would not see and **ears** that would not hear...’

We can see in the (c) examples of (16–18) that *grandes*, *periodistas*, *ojos*, *oidos* bear a plural marker, the bold *-s* at the end of the noun and adjective phrases, a marking that central Basque (but not Eastern Basque, as the (b) examples show) would have replicated using *-a* and *-ak* articles. The same facts support Trask’s observation that “[...] *ura* may correspond either to ‘water’ or to ‘the water’, and *umeak* may correspond either to ‘children’ or to ‘the children’.” (2003: 121).

If this happened this way, and the overt plural morphology of the neighboring languages played a role on the spread of *-ak* as a plural marker – and no longer as a definiteness marker – we could formulate the following hypothesis: *-ak* spread to “nonnatural” contexts earlier than *-a*.

Remember that we also have a similar variation with singular predicates and nouns as the one depicted in examples (16–18) with the plural ones.

This hypothesis must be checked on texts and dialectal variation, but so far this task, together with many others, remains undone. This is an example of how many aspects of the morphosyntax of Basque are to be targeted in order to get a full vision of the data, their diachronic evolution, and how they got to be the way they are when approaching them from a synchronic perspective.

Now, coming back to the diachronic evolution of the articles sketched in (1), we should keep in mind that some Basque articles may not have followed that typical grammaticalization path, and that other factors related to language contact may have altered what we would consider as the “proper” evolution of D-elements; this time, the pressure of the overt plurality marking of the neighboring languages has, according to Irigoien, deeply affected the range of uses of Basque articles. This is true not only for *-a* and *-ak*, but also for other D-elements, as I will illustrate in Section 5.2.

The development of number and definiteness marking have to be analyzed together. Both categories most probably did not have an Indoeuropean fashioned overt expression in Basque prior to contact with Latin or other languages.

## 5. What do diachronic data tell us about the synchronic situation

In Section 3 I presented some data and problems that have been addressed by Basque synchronic studies, and in Section 4 I have tried to situate them in their diachronic context. In this section I will offer some ideas that result from combining synchronic and diachronic approaches.

The facts presented in the previous sections can be summarized as follows:

1 Mass and plural non-specific expressions bear articles in object position; this is true for most Basque speakers. This unexpected behavior has been dealt with by synchronic analyses (Section 3).

2 However, in the same syntactic contexts, some Eastern dialects and old texts which seem to represent the whole Basque speaking territory show articleless noun phrases (Section 4.1).

3 Articleless noun phrases are considered to be the archaic forms, reflecting a time when Basque lacked articles (Section 4.2).

4 Besides the grammaticalization of D-elements, number marking has been claimed to have played a crucial role on the spread of articles. Thus, the unexpected behavior depicted in 3.1 would have an explanation beyond the regular grammaticalization path usually assumed for articles (Section 4.3).

5 The articles *-a* and *-ak* and their spread: Crossroads between synchrony and diachrony

Assuming the diachronic framework I have just summarized as a plausible one, it may provide some hints for a better understanding of the phenomena as a whole.

1. From a certain point of view, synchrony and diachrony are nothing but methodological partitions of a reality; thus, it is natural to find similar patterns guiding diachronic change as well as serving for the explanation of data under a synchronic perspective. In the case I've been discussing here, synchronic analyses had to face the non-expected use of the article with mass and plural expressions in the internal argument position (Section 3.2); now, if we look at diachronic and dialectal data, it turns out that those very same noun phrases have had “problems” when developing the use of articles in that very same context: crucially, they have been bare until recently. I believe both kind of data and their respective analyses represent the two sides of the same coin: diachrony shows that certain noun phrases have been “resistant” to articles exactly where synchrony has problems to analyze them.



2. The following observation may indicate another interesting crossroads between diachronic evolution and synchronic analyses: one of Artiagoitia's hypotheses aiming at a characterization of the noun phrases with an article considers those determiner phrases to be simple noun phrases by themselves. Thus, *ardo-a* 'wine-the' would not be analyzed as noun-DET; rather, *ardoa* as a whole would be understood as a single noun. Artiagoitia rejects this hypothesis, since *ardo* also exists as a clearly identifiable item when combined with other elements (*ardo asko* 'lots of wine', *ardo ona* 'good wine', partitive *ardorik...*).

3. However, I believe that the simple fact of taking that hypothesis as a possibility is a good approximation of the situation: the situation assumed by that hypothesis would be exactly the situation described by the last step in scale (1) for the grammaticalization of demonstratives. We could say that some possible future patterns begin to come up in the current language situation. Indeed, certain varieties (Sagarzazu 2005: 71) have extended the use of the article to a degree that it has almost become a mere noun marker, exactly as illustrated by the last step in the grammaticalization path in (1). A good example of this situation is the 1857 Navarrese text in Satrustegi (1987: 247–261):

<b>Singular</b>			
<b>Absolutive</b>	umea ‘the kid’		< ume ha ‘that kid’
<b>Genitive</b>	umearen ‘of the kid’		< ume haren ‘of that kid’
<b>Dative</b>	umeari ‘to the kid’		< ume hari ‘to that kid’
<b>Locative</b>	etxean ‘in the house’		< etxe hanz ‘in that house’
<b>Plural</b>			
<b>Ergative</b>	umeek ‘the kids’		< ume hek ‘those kids’
<b>Genitive</b>	umeen ‘of the kids’		< ume hen ‘of those kids’
<b>Local cases</b>	etxeetan ‘in the houses’		< etxe hetan ‘in those houses’
	etxetara ‘to the houses’		< etxe hetara ‘to those houses’
	...		
	ardo	Ø	
	trenak	Ø	

b

- DP
- (19) a. izen-**a** oneq name-**art** this  
 ‘this name’
- b. Ysraelitarr-**a** otatiq israelian-**art**  
 from.these  
 ‘out of these israelian’
- c. vi Ciudadi-**a** hoq two city-**art** these  
 ‘these two cities’
- d. ordub- artan  
**a**  
 time-**art** in.that  
 ‘at that time’
- e. vadirela iru persona distintu-**aq**  
 that.there.are three person different-**rt.pl**

This massive use of *-a* seems to be idiolectal; as far as I am aware, in modern Navarrese the use of *-a* is not as generalized as in this text. However, I believe that some of the examples in (19) reflect a current tendency of the language. As we can see, most of these noun phrases are double determined by an article and a demonstrative (19a–d); the expletive article can also be attached to a relative clause already determined by a demonstrative, like in (19g). The noun phrase in (19e) offers a good example of how plurality marking might be playing a role on the spread of the article. In (19f) a place name like Madrid bears a definite article; this is a common pattern in the contemporary speech of the Maldaerreaka valley of the north of Navarre, where place names like *Ituren*, *Saldias*, *Labaien*, *Irun*, etc. use to bear an article in regular speech (*Ituna*, *Saldisa*, *Labaina*, *Iruna* etc.). A more extreme example is the one in (19h), where the article is applied to every single component of the noun phrase (*pobri-a*, *on-a*); on the other hand, compare this with *araco guizon aberetsa ura* 'that rich man there' in the same text, where “only” the adjective *aberets* 'rich' bears the expletive article, while *guizon* 'man' remains bare.

Two further notes can be made regarding the examples in (19): first, the nature and shape of the noun seems to be irrelevant, since the double-determined nouns can be loan words or inherited words, and they can have a consonant or vowel ending. And second, while the article is not phrasal in these examples, the marking of plurality seems to keep this feature (19b, c).

Again, dialectal and historical data offer a multi-colored situation that can be helpful for synchronic analyses.

3. The solution offered by Artiagoitia, once he rejects the possibility of treating the noun phrases with *-a* as simple noun phrases with no determiner, may also be linked to certain ideas raised in diachronic studies: as mentioned above (Section 3.2), Artiagoitia suggests that those noun phrases that bear an article can be explained as part of a structure with a functional head related to number. Now, if we go back to Section 4.3, we see that a possible diachronic explanation for these phrases is related to number marking: it seems that on the model of neighbor languages, where number is overtly marked, Basque has replicated that feature spreading the use of articles.

Here again, the diachronic explanation in terms of language contact goes together well with the synchronic explanation characterizing those noun phrases as phrases pertaining to a certain functional category related to number. However, I would reiterate that the accuracy of a synchronic analysis is best tested by synchronic arguments: see Etxeberria (2009) for a discussion in synchronic terms of Artiagoitia's ideas, where the number phrase hypothesis is rejected, and it is claimed that in those cases a “pure” definite article simply shifts its type (2009: 330).

In this section I have listed in quite an informal fashion what the crossroads between diachrony and synchrony may be if we look at both kinds of data together; I have mainly focused on the prototypical article *-a* (and plural *-ak*).

## 5.2 D-elements as a whole

In Section 5.1 I have presented the diachronic background of certain synchronic phenomena related to the behavior of *-a*, the element considered the article *par excellence* in Basque.

However, as said in Section 2.2, we have additional D-elements besides *-a*; looking at them will offer us a more comprehensive view of articles, since the spread of *-a/-ak* may be understood as a part of a broader phenomenon.

In this section I will illustrate very briefly how the use of other D-elements, especially genitive plural *-en*, may have spread pushed by the model of Romance constructions.

In a well known medieval document (Michelena 1964: 45) we find the following 1074 text: “In partibus Iberiae, iuxta aqua currentis, soto uno, que dicitur a rusticis **Aker Çaltua**, nos possumus dicere **saltus ircorum**” (bold mine JM). Furthermore, there is an additional note between the lines in Visigothic script, offering a Romance translation to the noun phrases in bold: *soto de ueko*. Thus, according to this medieval testimony the Latin *saltus hircorum* corresponds to Basque *aker zaldua*; this could be translated into English as ‘billy-goat woods’ or ‘woods of billy-goats’. *Aker Çaltua* illustrates some Basque morphology, especially with the help of its Latin translation. On the one hand, the obligatoriness of article in the denominative form of nouns becomes apparent in *Aker Çaltua*. On the other, we may also observe the compounding strategy of medieval (and modern) Basque, where a bare noun, *aker* ‘billy-goat’, modifies the principal noun, *zaldū* ‘woods’; most interestingly, the Latin counterpart of *aker* is *ircorum*, a noun in genitive plural case.

This construction is a productive one for compounding in Basque (*lagun taldea* ‘group of **friends**’, Sp. ‘grupo de **amigos**’; *auto saltzailea* ‘**car** seller’, Sp. ‘vendedor de **coches**’...). A Basque bare (count) noun may correspond to a Romance plural form; as we can see, all Basque bare nouns as well as Romance plural nouns have a non-referential interpretation. This correspondence is similar to the one for examples (10–13) in old Basque: the Romance counterparts to Basque bare count nouns are usually bare plurals.

As for the Romance translation for *saltus ircorum*, read as *soto de ueko*, I do not have any convincing explanation for the singular *ueko*, which maybe I would have expected to appear as *uekos*; the Basque character of the monk could be a possible explanation for it, but the little data we have do not allow us to make any clear claim about that.

I will now introduce some data that may complete the view I have of the spreading of D-elements, especially in noun compounding constructions: indeed, in modern Basque we can find examples, even though they are not general, with a “noun-GEN.PL noun” structure. I will now offer three particular examples witnessing this contact induced change, currently in progress:

1. At the University of the Basque Country a new name has been given to the old

*Filologia, Historia eta Geografia Fakultatea/Facultad de Filología, Historia y Geografía* ‘Faculty of Philology, History and Geography’. Its current Spanish name is *Facultad de Letras*, which following the typical compound construction mentioned above would have led to a translation like *Letra Fakultatea*; however, it has been translated as *Letren Fakultatea*, literally *Facultad de LAS Letras*, ‘Faculty of THE Letters’ with a genitive plural D-element *-en* serving as a “better”, “more literal” translation of the plural overt morphology of the Romance form. The contrast between medieval *Aker Çaltua* (not *Akerren Çaltua*) and *letren fakultatea* is clear: the latter, as opposed to an ideal *Letra Fakultatea* and to *Aker Çaltua*, is an example of a change currently in progress in the language: the D-element *-en*, a former demonstrative, thus definite *per se*, no longer indicates any definiteness value, but its only purpose is to convey plurality.

2. On a TV show broadcasted in both Spanish and Basque (12/23/2009, contents index available at

[http://teknopolis.elhuyar.org/programa.asp?Programa\\_Kodea=79&](http://teknopolis.elhuyar.org/programa.asp?Programa_Kodea=79&lang=EU)

[lang=EU](http://teknopolis.elhuyar.org/programa.asp?Programa_Kodea=79&lang=EU) HYPERLINK

“[http://teknopolis.elhuyar.org/programa.asp?Programa\\_Kodea=79&lang=EU](http://teknopolis.elhuyar.org/programa.asp?Programa_Kodea=79&lang=EU)”

[http://teknopolis.elhuyar.org/programa.asp?Programa\\_Kodea=79&lang=EU](http://teknopolis.elhuyar.org/programa.asp?Programa_Kodea=79&lang=EU)

, a section was called *Polvo de Estrellas* ‘Star dust’ in the Spanish version; again, its Basque counterpart was entitled *Izarren Hautsa*, *izar-en hauts-a* ‘star-GEN.PL dust-ART’, literally ‘the dust of the stars’, instead of *Izar Hautsa*. The popular Basque poem called *Izarren Hautsa* (Lete 1974) has most surely played a role in choosing this translation for *Polvo de estrellas*.

3. The Basque construction *X bila* means ‘looking for X’. When the noun in the X position has no referent in the actual world (thus non-referential), like in ‘looking for books (any)’ or ‘looking for food’, bare nouns are used in Basque: *liburu bila*, *janari bila* (*liburu* ‘book’, *janari* ‘food’). Their definite counterparts bear the genitive plural marker *-en*: *liburuen bila* ‘looking for the books’. In the same vein as the precedent examples, it could be argued that a new pattern may be arising in current speech: in the Basque newspaper *Berria* (2010–3–8, page 20) the noun phrase *planeten bila* (*planeta* ‘planet’) is used, but it does not refer to particular planets, but to any planet astronomers may find; Spanish counterparts of this kind of sentences (*en busca de planetas*, a genitive expression with over plurality marking) would seem to play a crucial role as a model for Basque speakers, introducing a construction rivaling the still standard Basque *planeta bila* ‘looking for planets’. It is true, however, that this example is not a clear one: it can be argued that reference is made to the hypothetical planets already mentioned in the previous discourse, so definite marking could be licensed by previous mention.

However it might be, there is a further note worth making on this *X bila*

construction: its behavior fits exactly with the variation observed in the discussion of the examples in (5). When a further modifying item is added (like in the mentioned pair *on da* ‘it is good’ vs *gauza ona* ‘it is a good thing’) the use of a D-element, genitive plural *-en* in this case, becomes possible: *planeta bila* ‘looking for planets’ does not bear any D-element, but when an adjective like *berri* ‘new’ is added to the phrase, a construction like *planeta berrien bila* ‘looking for new planets’ can be found, a construction with a D-element *-en* but with no definite reference, as reflected by the English translation. The construction *planeta berri bila* with no D-element is also possible in this case. The similar behavior showed by *-a* and *-en*, even though we are dealing with different constructions, points again towards the same idea: they both share certain features that are best explained by their common origin and the similar diachronic processes they are undergoing.

I think that these examples, as opposed to the 1074 place name and to the still productive and general modern compounding pattern, are good examples of how a former demonstrative (*hen* genitive plural, ‘of them’) may end up conveying information that has nothing to do with a definite interpretation.<sup>8</sup> The change I have just outlined here is only a plausible hypothesis about what is going on these kinds of structures; the extensive analysis of more data that could eventually support these ideas consistently is a task that remains undone.

## 6. Concluding remarks

Two main ideas can be highlighted from the preceding discussion: first, the amazing spread of *-a/-ak* articles (especially plural *-ak*) can be compared to and analyzed together with other seemingly unrelated elements that share the same origin; crucially, elements like *-en* are undergoing the same (or similar) evolution as *-a/-ak*, and in both cases we are most surely witnessing a contact induced spread. Second, the dialectal and historical evolution of noun phrases seems to reflect the same general patterns described in synchronic analyses; thus, from a diachronic perspective, the different interpretation constraints at the synchronic level could be understood as chronologically progressive levels of spread of the D-elements. I believe that these two points make apparent how helpful diachronic insights may happen to be for synchronic studies.

Many questions can be formulated continuing with this discussion, which may serve as a basis for further studies:

1. One may wonder, whether plural D-elements (such as *-ak*, *-en...*), as opposed to singular ones, have been or are currently the first spreading to contexts where

8. The identity between the *-e*-appearing in plural definite cases (see Table 1 *-en*, *-ek*, *-eta-*) and the epenthetic *-e*-that is introduced between determinerless nouns ending in a consonant and suffixes beginning in a consonant (locative *etxe-tan* house-in ‘in houses’ but *lan-e-tan* work-EPENTHESIS-in ‘in works’; ergative *ume-k* kid-ERGATIVE ‘kids’ but *lagun-e-k* friend-EPENTHESIS-ERGATIVE ‘friends’) may also play a role in the spreading of plural forms; their confusion is a typical feature of certain varieties. This is an issue I cannot enter into now.

definiteness marking plays no role. One could also check whether this observation is somehow reflected by any synchronic effect.

1 In the same vein, one could also compare mass and plural expressions, maybe predicting mass expressions to acquire articles later than plural expressions, since it is the need of an overt plurality (not singularity) marking that makes articles spread. This would imply that some differences between mass and plural expressions could be described at the synchronic level.

2 It could be interesting to check whether animacy or similar factors have played a role in the spread of plurality marking. Languages tend to mark plurality in animate nouns (especially humans) rather than in other kind of nouns (Haspelmath 2011).

As a general remark, I would like to recall that extensive descriptive work on the referential systems of Basque dialects is still lacking. In the future, all these questions may simply find their answers by looking at texts and dialectal data.

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